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SUBJECT: MAURITANIAN MEDIA REACTION (MARCH 1-10), GAZA CRISIS: RICE VISIT

¶1. SUMMARY: Throughout the past two weeks the Mauritanian media has been closely following events in Gaza and Israel. Almost all coverage has followed mid east wires and other sources from the region with a generally condemnatory tone towards Israel. Comment has been limited. However, a number of papers, both Arabic and French, have carried the statements and calls for demonstrations of the left leaning Islamic opposition party, national movement for reform and development (PMRD/Tawassoul). Tawassoul issued a number of strong denunciations of the Israeli "massacre" and generated limited local protests against Israel, calling for an end of Mauritanian/Israeli diplomatic relations. Of more gravity, is a similar editorial in the March 2, Nouakchott Info, an influential paper strongly identified with the Prime Minister and the business community. This editorial appeared in both the French and Arabic editions of the paper and is outlined below. End Summary

¶2. The Info editorial leads with, Quote: The massacre perpetrated by the Israeli army against the Palestinians in the Gaza has largely targeted the most vulnerable sectors of the Palestinian people, women, children, and the elderly. The raids made by the Israeli Air Force continue under cover of the silence of the international community. End quote.

¶3. The editorial continues to condemn "the cruel silence" of the international community and the United Nations toward the genocide and the disproportionate collective punishment carried out by the Israeli forces against "harmless civilians," located in "the biggest prison and the largest ghetto in the world." The article condemned "the passive attitude" adopted by the government of Arab and Muslim countries facing this "brutal aggression" against the inhabitants of the Gaza.

¶4. All papers carried without comment the Mauritanian Foreign Ministry statement of March 2nd asking Israel to end the air strikes and condemning the use of force and violence on both sides. The statement reaffirmed Mauritania's choice for peace as a strategy on the one hand and on the other hand its solidarity with the Palestinian people, calling the international community to intervene in order to stop the continuing bloodbath and find a solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict so that the Palestinian people could recover its rights through an independent state with Jerusalem as capital.

¶5. However, both Nouakchott Info and its Arabic mirror, Akbar Nouachott, (also reflective of elements close to PM and business community) reminded their readers that all political forces in Mauritania from both opposition and majority have asked for the an end to relations with Israel, stating that it is time to realize that "the Mauritania-Israel relations supposed to assist some in Mauritania only results in isolation and instability." The editorial underscored that Mauritians are waiting for President Abdallahi to honor the commitment he made during the presidential campaign to present the Israeli-Mauritanian relations question before

Mauritanian parliamentarians and let them to decide. The papers noted that all parliamentarians from the opposition and the majority are in favor of the cutting of these relations.

¶6. The Israeli relations question continued to simmer in the media into this week. The Secretary General of the Presidency, Ould Ahmed El Waghef, had been quoted in the Qatari paper, *Arraya*, last week as stating that parliamentarians of the majority party, PNDD, as well as the opposition parties would vote to nullify relations with Israel if the question came before parliament. In a talk show discussion on Mauritanian TV, March 8, the party stepped back from the quote and denied that it had been made.

¶7. Arabic language papers on March 9 and 10 have mentioned the retraction noting that the initial statement by the Secretary General would show that only the President continues to support full relations with Israel.

BOULWARE